

Saskatchewan's independent newsmagazine

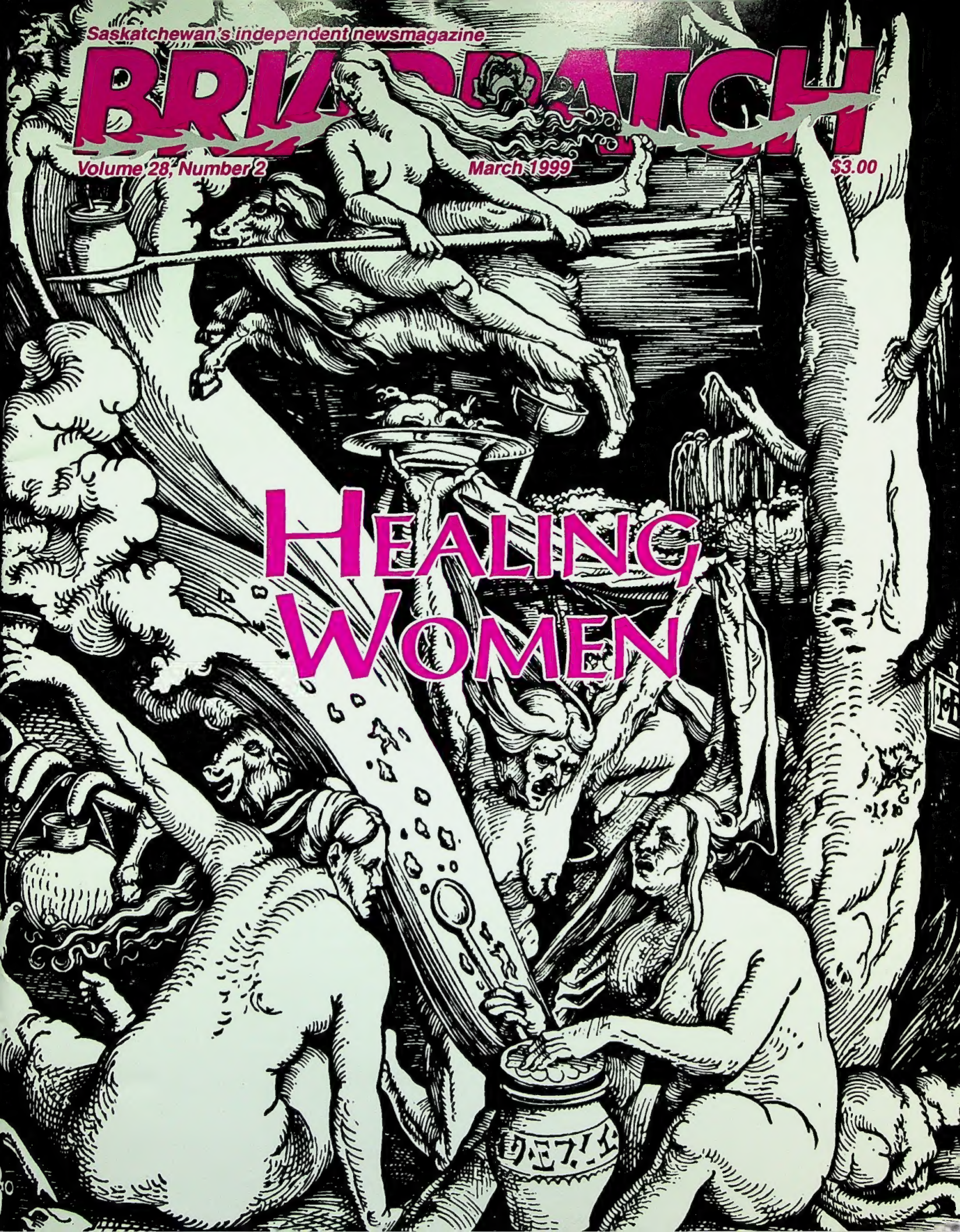
# BRIZPATCH

Volume 28, Number 2

March 1999

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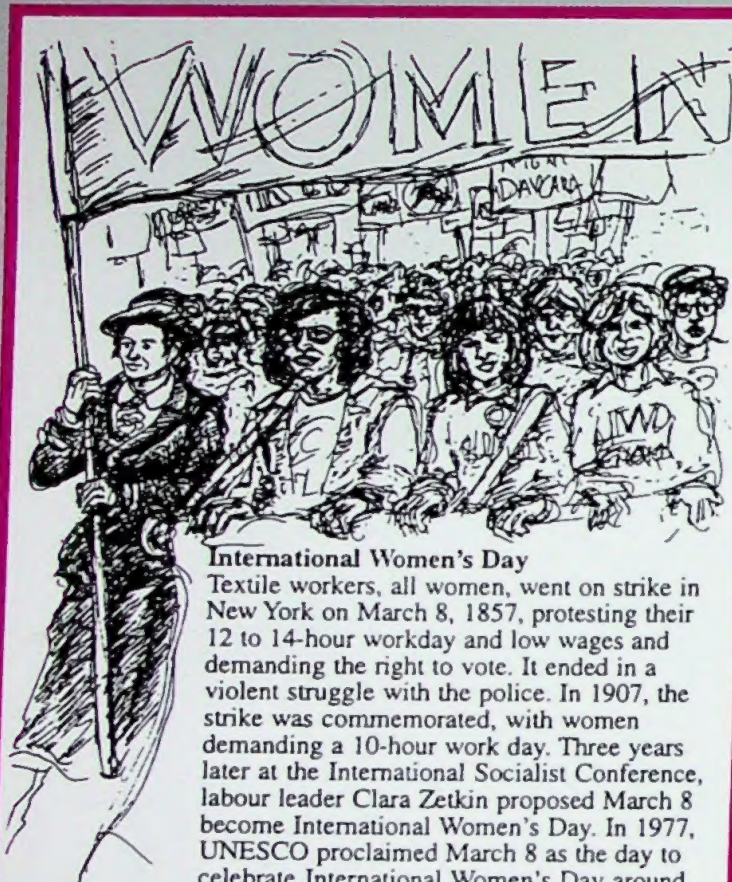
## HEALING WOMEN





## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

*Briarpatch* is pleased to produce this special issue dedicated to the women of the world. The theme for this year's special issue focuses on healing as interpreted or experienced by women. We would like to thank the many women who coordinated and contributed to this issue. Without their hard work and dedication, this project would not have been possible.



**International Women's Day**  
Textile workers, all women, went on strike in New York on March 8, 1857, protesting their 12 to 14-hour workday and low wages and demanding the right to vote. It ended in a violent struggle with the police. In 1907, the strike was commemorated, with women demanding a 10-hour work day. Three years later at the International Socialist Conference, labour leader Clara Zetkin proposed March 8 become International Women's Day. In 1977, UNESCO proclaimed March 8 as the day to celebrate International Women's Day around the world.

## ONE FOR THE GIPPER

What happens when you fly from Orange County, California to Washington, D.C.? You leave John Wayne Airport and arrive in Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. No lie. It's true.

The airport was renamed for Reagan to "honour" the 40th U.S. president who, ironically, fired 12,000 striking air-traffic controllers. President Clinton signed the necessary bill on February 6, the Gipper's birthday.

Americans for Tax Reform has a pet project called The Reagan Legacy Project, whose goal is to name "buildings, airports, highways, schools, mountains, national parks and monuments, libraries and museums" after Rotten Ronnie, whom they refer to as America's "greatest president." They hope to name 600 monuments after the president in the next ten years.

Existing tributes include the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C., the city's second-largest federal building. Another one is the nuclear aircraft carrier, *The Ronald Reagan*.

But the most grandiose scheme of all was documented in *GQ* magazine. David Kamp reported that The Reagan Legacy Project wants to add Ronnie's face to Mount Rushmore, beside Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.

But the group doesn't want to stop at the U.S. border. Maybe that's why they've added Conrad Black to their board of advisors. They hope his influence will help convince right-wing governments in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa to rename monuments for the U.S. president who helped tear down the Iron Curtain and replace it with compliant oligarchies who support the corporate dream of globalization.

Think of it. Rename the Lenin Tomb. Rename Ho Chi Minh Avenue in Maputo, Mozambique. Rename monuments to Sandino in Nicaragua.

Here's a serious suggestion: rename the hangman's noose the Ronald Reagan Necktie.

## UNDER THE GUN

The City of New Orleans, Louisiana is the first city in U.S. history to take the country's powerful gun manufacturers to court, demanding compensation for the damage their products have caused in their murder-ridden city. New Orleans lawmakers are trying to do to Smith & Wesson, Colt, Beretta and 13 other handgun makers what the State of Louisiana did to tobacco firms in 1994 - sue them for the social and health costs of their "unreasonably dangerous" output. The lawsuit is also aimed at pawn shops selling guns over the counter and local affiliates of the National Rifle Association.



Ronald Reagan in a scene from *The Bad Man*.



**Briarpatch** is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide an open forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

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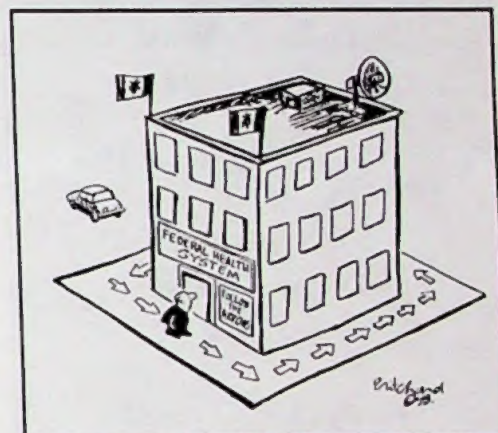
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**COVER GRAPHIC**

Hans Baldung Grien

1514

# A New Alternative

**T**hey're tired of rural roads being pounded to pieces by large trucks, and rail branch lines and elevators being dismantled. So a group of farmers, workers and community activists have offered to work with the British Columbia and Saskatchewan governments to develop a new systems approach to grain movement that regains market power for

farmers and minimizes total costs in order to maximize returns at the farm gate and retain rural economic activity and jobs.

The Prairie Alliance for the Future (PAFF) took this message to recent meetings in Victoria and Regina with key cabinet ministers in the B.C. and Saskatchewan governments.

"Our objective is to open a dia-

## LETTERS

**Dear Briarpatch,**

I was disappointed by Lukin Robinson's article, "Alexa's Retreat." The Canadian Left should be united and reach out to as many Canadians as it can to defeat the Liberals in the next election. Unless the Liberals, Reform and Tories are shut out of power in Ottawa, we will see the privatization of VIA Rail, the CBC, even Canada Post, plus further trade deals and the destruction of UI. Only the NDP offers a true alternative for progressive government in Ottawa.

The NDP has never surrendered to injustice and the assaults of the right-wing. Perhaps the NDP has lost battles with the Right, but it has not lost the war nor succumbed to the Right. Of course there is always a place for constructive criticism of the NDP. However I don't believe we should undermine the NDP at a time when they are the only party willing to take up the battles of the Left.

**George Wooldridge  
Edenwold, SK**

**Dear Briarpatch,**

While I concede that we must exercise caution, in view of the despicable double-cross by the so-called

"New Labour" government in New Zealand awhile back, for Lukin Robinson to automatically proceed to tar Blair, Jospin, Schröder, and our own Alexa McDonough with the same brush is unfair.

While Robinson attempts to discredit the emerging modified Left, it is worth noting that Jospin of France was instrumental in stalling (temporarily at least) the MAI. As Anders Hayden points out, Europe is leading the way in coming to grips with the squeeze on employment to more adequately distribute the available employment opportunities, which scarcely smacks of getting in bed with corporate power.

Proceeding with another "New Movement" such as the New Green Alliance, just as the Waffle did before, will have the right-wing laughing all the way to the ballot box over splitting the leftist vote. Half a loaf is surely better than no bread, which is what we will have if we follow the cause of these ideological purists. The approach of these critics of evolving socialism may very well upset the whole apple cart. Is that what you want?

**Philip Lindenback  
Weekes, SK**



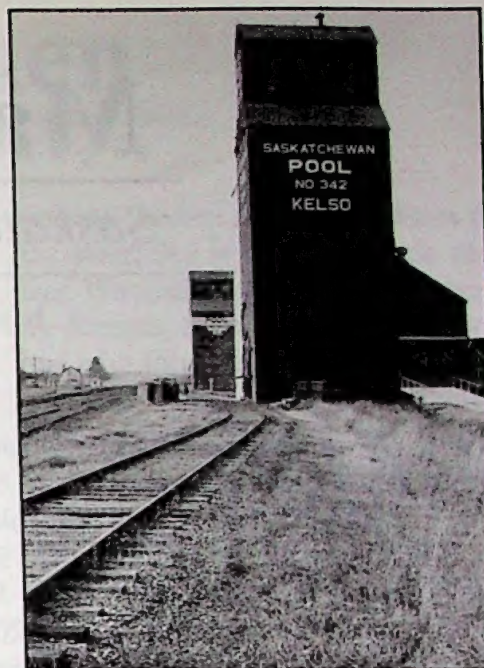
logue with governments to develop a grain collection and forwarding system which is more responsive to community needs and makes the best possible use of rail branch lines and elevators that otherwise would be scrapped," said Kyle Korneychuk, a farmer from Pelly, Saskatchewan.

"We would like to extend this new concept for prairie grain gathering to a vertically integrated system that maximizes the flow of Canadian grain through Canadian ports and terminals," added Bob MacPherson, president of the B.C.-based Grain Workers Union.

The Prairie Alliance for the Future is advocating a Prairie Rail Au-

thority which would acquire branch lines and elevators to develop a cost effective grain handling system for producers. Government and producer investment would be recovered through reduced road damage and reduced negative community economic impact. A co-ordinated grain collection system would ensure present facilities are utilized to their full cost effective potential. A co-ordinated system would return some control and profits back to Canadian farmers and governments.

For more information, contact PAFF at 1219 Wiggins Avenue S., Saskatoon, SK S7H 2J4; phone (306) 374-2905; fax (306) 374-2906.



# For Whom the Bell Tolls

*Bell Canada sells out its female employees.*

by George Manz

In January, Bell Canada announced it was selling its profitable telephone-operator division to Excell Global Services, a U.S.-based company that runs a low-wage, non-union call centre business. The move will affect 2,500 employees, most of them women, who are members of the Communications, Energy and Paperwork-ers Union of Canada.

CEP president Fred Pomeroy described the Bell move as a "greed-motivated sellout and a callous response to the employees' efforts to gain pay equity."

He noted that the company is "willing to destroy the livelihoods of 2,500 operators to make a few more bucks," stressing these workers are the same women that Bell has fought tooth and nail to avoid its pay equity obligations.

Bell's plans include shrinking the company's 55 work centres

spread throughout Ontario and Quebec to five. A single-parent mom will find it difficult to uproot her family in Belleville so she can relocate them in another city that's also too far to commute to. That means many of the employees will lose their jobs. Finding a new job won't be easy either, not with Canada's already high unemployment rate.

And those who do move will be faced with a 40 percent wage reduction and loss of seniority if the company gets its way.

Eighty percent of Canadians surveyed feel that Bell, which has received research grants and tax breaks from the Canadian government, should not be allowed to sell off its operators' jobs to a U.S. company.

If the telephone-operators win their pay equity case, which has been in the courts since 1992, they stand to get substantial pay increases, which would bring their wages to the same

level as higher-paid, mostly male telephone technicians.

CEP sees the latest Bell maneuver as a punch below the belt, an underhanded way of circumventing the ongoing pay equity dispute before the courts.

"Plans for a full-scale fightback campaign are underway," Pomeroy said. "We will fight this move in every way possible, including through the legal process, collective bargaining, the political process, the workplace and in the streets."

At a demonstration outside Bell's head office in Montreal, Pomeroy told hundreds of demonstrators that "Bell Canada is going to be putting up a white flag instead of a U.S. flag."

*George Manz is the editor of Briarpatch.*



# Marianne Livant

*Saskatchewan loses a dance pioneer.*

by Monica Prendergast

**M**arianne Livant died on November 24, 1998 in Victoria Hospice after a brief conflict with cancer. She was 69 years old.

Marianne arrived in Regina in 1967, after her life had already taken her from Berlin to England and then to the United States. She spent over 20 years in Regina before retiring to Victoria in 1989. Her contribution to the dance world in Saskatchewan remains as a great legacy in that she almost single-handedly brought modern dance to the province.

Regina Modern Dance Workshop (RMDW) began in 1968 under Marianne's artistic directorship and she remained at the head of the organization for the next dozen years. Her mandate was always a populist one - she strongly believed that dance was for everyone. She carried out this mission by working in schools and communities across the province, including remote districts in the far north. Many of her dancers developed through workshops in schools and then with the company itself, and they performed often in Regina as well as on tour. She brought professional dancers to Regina from all over North America who helped her move the company forward on an artistic level. The company flourished under Marianne's energetic leadership and received multiple funding grants from different branches of government.

Dance education became another important struggle for Marianne and she lobbied hard to develop dance programs to be part of the arts curriculum in Saskatchewan schools. She also worked in senior citizens' homes by bringing in elementary school children to dance with the residents. After leaving RMDW, she continued her work at Regina General Hospital in the 1980s as a music and movement therapist.

There are thousands of Saskatchewan residents who will remember dancing with Marianne in one of hundreds of school gyms, church halls or hospital wards. She drew her audiences into her participatory brand of dance as they sang or clapped along, or perhaps chanted a litany of local place names - "Waskesiu, Wapella, Ile-a-la-Crosse, La Ronge, Maple Creek, Elbow, Eyebrow, Moscow, Mozart...." This truly was dance for all.

In Victoria, Marianne always continued to work for



*Marianne leading the children in Chiapas.*

others during her retirement. She was an active member in the Central American Support Committee. Through her involvement in Building Bridges, another Central American support network, she went to Mexico in early 1998 as an Observer for Justice in Chiapas. While there she charmed the people she met with her music and dance-making powers, leading Mexican children through the village like the Pied Piper.

Before her death, Marianne was visited by many family members and friends, including several of her "dance chickens" (husband Bill's fond term) from her time with RMDW.

A memorial took place on January 9 in Victoria's Jewish Community Centre. Participants shared stories of her life, listened to music and danced, and watched a video of Marianne speaking about her early life as well as her work in Regina. Her amazing energy and total commitment to whomever or whatever was crossing her path was a recurrent theme in the stories told that day.

One former RMDW dancer, Pearl Louie, told how Marianne had literally changed her life. Another speaker, Martha Livingstone, referring to Chairman Mao in summing up Marianne's life, asserted that Marianne's work had always been "heavier than Mount Tai" in the service of the people.

*Monica Prendergast was one of Marianne's dance students as well as her daughter-in-law.*



# Healing Women

by Cara Banks & Aina Kagis

In this issue celebrating International Women's Day, *Briarpatch* looks at notions of healing as interpreted or experienced by women. We chose the title "Healing Women" because it can refer to women as healers, and to women's desire to be healed. Exploring the notion of healing from a woman's perspective naturally evolved into several perspectives, ranging from broader, more political outlooks to personal stories and spiritual journeys.

Priscilla Settee looks at healing as an overtly political project. Settee describes the struggles of Indigenous women around the world to heal communities ravaged by poverty, isolation and so-called "development." Alternatively, these women are struggling to protect their communities from new breeds of predators. Pharmaceutical companies are among these, Settee writes: with herbal remedies now considered more or less mainstream, these companies are keen to appropriate traditional Indigenous knowledge of plants' healing properties.

Appropriation is also a theme of Lori Stinson O'Gorman's article on midwifery. She argues that the medical industry that has developed around pregnancy and birth effectively controls women and their reproductive capacities. She characterizes the debate about the legalization of midwifery and the question of choice as a capitulation to that loss of control. To merely fight for the right to have a midwife misses the more crucial need for women to control their reproduction, pregnancy, and birthing.

Historically, midwifery was practiced by witches: not the evil, gnarled women of popular imagination, but wise women whose attendance at births was both useful and comforting. As Donna Frandsen

writes, witches were frequently reviled by the church for helping to ease women's pain during childbirth. That pain was apparently both punishment and atonement for Eve's sin and was not to be alleviated.

Frandsen examines the huge gap between historical, literary and popular representations of witches and what we know of their many healing practices. Those practices, she writes, often included work that others preferred not to do - setting bones and letting blood, for example. Despite, or perhaps because of witches' healing abilities, they were persecuted by the powers-that-be.

Even in today's world, ambivalence about the caring or healing work that women do persists: it is economically undervalued (ask a health care or childcare worker); yet it is romanticized, idealized and uncritically celebrated by the mainstream media (Mother Teresa).

Cara Banks discusses another aspect of this ambivalence in her review of *One True Thing*. Banks writes that both the book and the movie identify a danger in assumptions that women are naturally inclined to be healers and nurturers. In *One True Thing*, as in life, Banks suggests that such an assumption leads naturally to the expectation that women will be the primary caregivers when a family member is ill or dying. Despite *One True Thing*'s somber subject, Banks encourages us to understand the subject as life-affirming as well.

In *Blooming in the Desert*, Kathy Fletcher describes a retreat designed to build a "healing community" for women living with breast cancer. Fletcher tells us that the healing - not the cure - comes from profound caring, listening, sharing, and touch. By forming a healing community on these

retreats, women are able to bloom in the desert that is their grief, pain and fear. Women heal their spiritual selves by forming connections with others and with forces beyond them.

One of the healing techniques Fletcher describes is Sacred Touch, comparable to Therapeutic Touch. According to Wendy Presant-Jahn, it "can relieve pain and promote healing without actually touching the person." In *Medicine Woman*, Presant-Jahn tells us that the conventional medical world scorned her use of Therapeutic Touch, and that this experience served as the impetus for her career in naturopathic medicine. She decries the extent to which the allopathic medical system and most governments still dismiss practices like hers. Only British Columbia provides medicare coverage for naturopathic treatments, so they remain unavailable to all but the affluent.

Affluence and its absence provides the fodder for Loretta Gerlach's *Y Not*, a caustic commentary on the YWCA's annual Women of Distinction awards. Gerlach honours all women who receive no awards but who are distinguished by their ability, tested daily, to build lives exemplifying courage and grace.

The stories in this issue will, we hope, encourage readers to appreciate the diversity of points of view that co-exist on the subject of women and healing. While each story has a specific focus, we hope you will think about the ways in which the political, personal, and the spiritual aspects of healing women may interconnect.

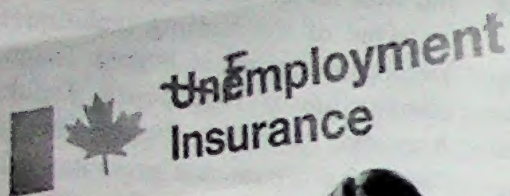
*Cara Banks is a member of the Briarpatch Board of Directors. Aina Kagis is a staff representative with CUPE and chair of the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan.*



# If corporate executives

# needed UI,

would the Liberal government have slashed benefits, made UI twice as difficult to get, and taken \$20 billion from the fund to reduce the deficit?



Please wait  
here for  
benefits —  
while supplies  
last...

Philippe Landreville



Join the UI campaign: Tell your member of Parliament that workers need UI. For facts and arguments, contact your labour council, your federation of labour, your regional CLC office, or visit our web site: [www.clc-ctc.ca](http://www.clc-ctc.ca).



# Medicine Woman

## *How I became a naturopathic doctor.*

by Wendy Present-Jahn

**M**y health care career started when I was eleven. I made poultices from flour, water, grass and flowers and applied them to mosquito bites. As a teenager, I was an active first aid member in the St. John Ambulance Brigade. At the age of 19, I entered a program in registered nursing. During my second year of training I found out about the Ontario College of Naturopathic Medicine and was interested, but decided to finish nursing school first. After graduation, I worked in a small, general hospital in northern Ontario. Here I realized

the limitations of nursing and observed that the pills I handed out often didn't really help the chronic conditions.

The trigger that shot me along the path toward natural medicine was one specific incident. We had a diabetic suffering incredible pain in his leg. The tentative diagnosis was gangrene, but he was scheduled for assessment at a larger hospital. We couldn't medicate him because it might "mask" his symptoms and make diagnosis more difficult. He was writhing and moaning with pain when I entered his room that day. Before working at this hospital I had studied Therapeutic Touch, a technique that can relieve pain and promote healing without actually touching the person. After obtaining his permission, I began working on him, only to be stopped by a senior nurse demanding to know what I was doing. On hearing my explanation, she flew out of the room and shortly thereafter I was "ordered" not to perform this technique on any more patients. Later, speaking with the nursing supervisor, my offer to give an inservice to the nursing staff on Therapeutic Touch was turned down. Interestingly enough, within two years



Therapeutic Touch became an accepted intervention with the Ontario College of Nurses.

I worked at this hospital for about another year, then moved back to Guelph, Ontario. Here I obtained the university prerequisite courses for the Ontario College of Naturopathic Medicine (now called the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine), and moved to Toronto to start the program in 1991. The college teaches basic medical sciences in a very similar way to allopathic medical schools. But unlike any other medical college in

Canada, they teach a unique blend of traditional healing arts. I sat, enthralled, learning that the body heals itself when given the right support. This support comes from the food we eat and the way we live our lives. Health imbalances can be corrected with remedies such as herbs, homeopathy and acupuncture.

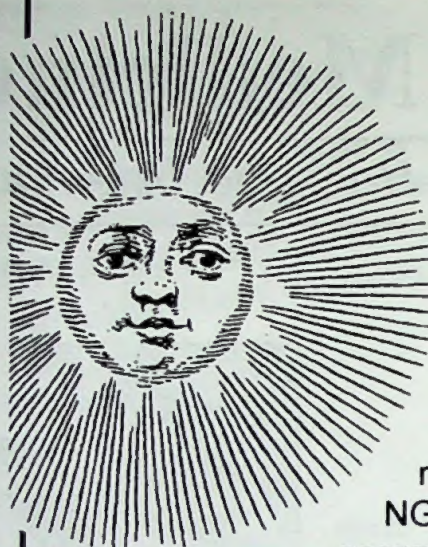
I graduated in 1995 and married my husband who was just finishing his training at Depot in Regina as an RCMP constable. We were posted to Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. I had misgivings about setting up practice in this small town, far removed from the alternative health scenes of Ontario and British Columbia. The naturopathic association in Saskatchewan has only five members, unlike the hundreds in Ontario and B.C. With a few cards placed in the local health food store and a couple of talks given in town, the people started to come. Word of mouth spread quickly, and now most new patients come on the advice of a friend or family member who has already seen me. There is a keen interest in natural medicine, which has been brought to the forefront by the media.



Most of the medical community remains ignorant about naturopathic doctors. Some allopathic doctors have taken the time to learn more about us. I had an allopathic doctor in Regina who sent many referrals my way. On the other hand, there was also a doctor in that city who refused to release a patient's lab report to me. He told the patient, "there is no point in sending this to her, she won't have the slightest idea how to interpret it." Of course I sent that doctor a letter informing him that naturopathic medicine is a regulated health care profession in Saskatchewan, that each graduate of our Canadian College has a minimum of seven years post secondary education, and that we certainly are trained to interpret lab reports!

Unfortunately naturopathic medicine remains financially out of reach for the poor. It is administered by trained doctors, using little or no expensive technology and provides a viable, safe option for many health conditions. Only B.C. provides coverage under the provincial Medicare plan. Patients in other provinces must rely on third party insurance or pay out of pocket. Naturopathic medicine plays an important role in health care and should be as accessible as allopathic medicine to all Canadians.

*Wendy Presant-Jahn practices naturopathic medicine in Fort-Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan.*



**A** new political party in Saskatchewan called the **New Green Alliance (NGA)** is now officially registered. The NGA will hold its second annual

convention at the Senior Citizens' Centre, 614-11th Street East in Saskatoon. March 26 - 28. Delegates will discuss resolutions, workshops, and election readiness. To register or for further information call (306) 352-0219 or interim leader Victor Lau at (306) 761-0037.

## OVERWORKED + UNDERVALUED = NURSING SHORTAGE



Illustration © Doug Martin 1999

**Keep the  
care  
in health care**



**"SUN is proud to support International Women's Day and women's struggle for pay equity."**



# Witches & the Healing Arts

by Donna Frandsen

**O**xford's definition of a witch is "a sorceress, especially a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits; an ugly old woman, a hag."

Covens of witches have been mistakenly connected with the naked orgies and the animal sacrifices of Satanism. A prevalent image is that of a circle of witches meeting covertly at midnight to call on the powers of evil to attend the planning of destructive and demonic deeds. Witches were blamed for the terrible plagues that swept Europe in the Middle Ages. However, the popular depiction through the ages of a witch as a hag performing deeds of unspeakable horror is not a true picture.

Often unacknowledged is a witch's ability to heal. A white witch has been described as one with a good disposition who uses witchcraft for

beneficial purposes. Nevertheless, superstition, anti-feminism, patriarchy and other societal influences have kept the stereotypical witch alive.



***Fear of the magical powers of village midwives and healers led to the demonization of women's curative skills. Here, active, powerful and threatening figures are shown concocting an ointment.***  
graphic: Hans Baldung Grien, 1514.

We are indoctrinated from an early age about the wickedness of the witch. Consider the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales we heard as children. In these tales, sadistic acts were often perpetrated against witches. Gretel shoves the witch into an oven, fastens the door and listens to the witch's screams as she burns to death.

Another German folk tale illustrates how the witch was regarded in the Middle Ages, but it may also provide us with a hint as to how society benefited from her functions. Before the birth of Rapunzel, her pregnant mother craves the delicious rampion that grows in the garden of the witch. When her husband is caught stealing this

plant he is forced to give up his unborn child to save his life and that of his wife. Rapunzel, which means rampion in German, becomes the



child's name. Rampion or bellflower was eaten as a vegetable, but a decoction of the roots as also found to be good for all inflammations of the mouth and throat, as well as excellent for the complexion.

Witches in the Middle Ages lived mostly in rural areas and cultivated gardens of vegetables and herbs. It was said they gathered plants in the fields and woods at midnight of the full moon. True, the potions and ointments composed of some of the plant materials could be used for evil purposes. Monkshood was so poisonous that victims who ingested it were in hideous agony before finally dying. The deadly nightshade or belladonna is also very poisonous. In local legend, henbane, a plant common in the United Kingdom, is worn by the dead as they wander by the Styx. The plant was used in magic for it could cause delirium and hallucinations. The juice of hemlock could render a man impotent and its use as a poison was well known particularly as the one that was taken by Socrates. The essence of a rose could entice a lover against his or her will.

But is the witch's reputation as the handmaiden of Satan deserved? In *Witchcraze*, Anne Llewellyn Barstow, a retired professor of history at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, states that because doctors were scarce in Europe until the 19th century, village wise women or witches did the work of "prescribing herbal cures, practising midwifery, and performing rituals of divination and healing."

The witch achieved benefits using her knowledge of herbal remedies. From the garden of the white witch would come a lemon balm for stomach problems. Betony was used as an aid for sleep. Some cures that are still used today include clary and spearmint oil as anti-spasmodics.

But what of the poisonous plants that were also part of her collection? Belladonna, commonly known as deadly nightshade, is extremely poi-

sonous. But a witch would have known that it could be used as a beauty aid to enlarge the pupil or could be used to alleviate pain. Atropine derived from belladonna is now used for safe eye surgery, as an anti-spasmodic, a diuretic or as an antidote to opium. Woody nightshade or bittersweet can cause death in large doses but was found to be useful as a treatment in skin diseases. Digitalis, an extract from the foxglove plant and sometimes called witchesglove, is used to treat heart conditions. It is said to have been first used by an English witch.

A massive industry has been built on the natural cures, household remedies and pharmaceuticals that once may have been the domain of the witch-healer. It is ironic that the existence and use of these materials was previously used to demonize witches who were primarily women.

Some witches were grudgingly accepted in the community as performing useful functions. An example of this is the wise woman who performed midwifery using knowledge and methods handed down from other women. She attended births of babies and knew potions to induce conception or sterility. The church criticized these women for using ergot to ease the pain of childbirth. It was believed that to atone for the sin of Eve, women should endure the pangs that accompany the birth of a child without complaint. Thus if the baby died, and many babies did, a midwife witch could be accused by the church of offering up the unbaptised baby to Satan or of purposely killing a baby in order to use its fat in the ointments she prepared.

White witches, whose religious beliefs originated with pagan earth-based spirituality and goddess-worship, were interested in the fertility of the land. They were asked to recommend farming practices that increased the harvest. Their skills were sought to cure a sick or injured sheep or cow even though a witch might often be accused of causing illness in the ani-

mals in the first place. The healer-witch was in tune with the cycles of the turning year. She used her powers of observation and tried-and-tested methods to improve the lives of her community.

Some of the work done by witches was what others preferred not to do. They often did the bloodletting that was thought to be beneficial. Or they were called upon to set broken bones or to prepare bodies for burial.

There is much diversity in the traditions and practices of modern witches. Some include men and some honour various divinities. Today's witch may cast spells and tell fortunes but others heal, mediate, and among other things, use song and movement to music to energize. Many witches are experienced as herbalists or holistic healers. In their quest to heal the body, mind and spirit, they may practice the arts of massage in its various forms or be naturopaths. Witches are bound by the Witches Rede: "If it harm none, do what you will." They also adhere to the Law of the Threefold Return; "What you give out returns to you threefold. If you work ill, threefold ill comes back at you. If you work good, threefold good comes back to you."

Witches of the healing sort are found in many countries around the globe. In South Africa, where witch-hunts still occur, laws are being passed to protect and legitimize witch-healers. In many societies witch doctors are mostly men who are revered for their power and for their healing activities. Why should women doing the same work be so feared?

We respect those who care for the Earth and its people, and who want health and harmony for everyone. The wise woman, the witch, is one who does this. Is she to be feared for her malevolence or credited for her healing?

*Donna Frandsen is an activist, a facilitator and a retired CUPW member.*



# Blooming in the Desert

*Women with breast cancer explore the spiritual resources which might support them in their journey.*

by Kathy Fletcher

A “Blue Moon” indicates something that is out of the ordinary, like, for instance, a rare treat. It was under just such an astronomical phenomenon that the first Blooming in the Desert retreat was held. On a bright winter evening at the end of January, eight women arrived at the Prairie Christian Training Centre in Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan to begin a weekend of exploration. My colleague, Wanda Barr, and I guided the exploration through a desert more commonly known as breast cancer. It was our hope that we might provide an opportunity for these women, each of whom is journeying with breast cancer, to explore their issues, choices, feelings, and concerns within the bounds of a supportive and nurturing group setting.

Blooming in the Desert is a retreat which has been designed to support individuals journeying with life-threatening illnesses such as cancer. It is offered by the Shekinah Foundation for Healing and Wholeness and draws heavily upon the example and experience of the Commonweal Cancer Help program in California. The name for the retreat was inspired by

words written in a hymn by Rob Johns who also journeyed with cancer: “Through tears and laughter shared and blessed, the desert yet shall bloom.”

Born in Saskatchewan, Shekinah seeks to provide an opportunity for people with life-threatening illnesses to explore the spiritual resources which might support them in their journey. The idea for Shekinah first came to me in 1993 as I looked out upon the vast and open prairie in the tiny rural village of Speers. The name “Shekinah” derives from the Hebrew word for the inner presence of the divine. It is a feminine word in the Hebrew language and it was one of those words I kept hearing in my head long

where they are growing.

Blooming in the Desert does not pretend to offer a cure for those journeying with a life-threatening illness. Instead, we offer an opportunity to form a healing community. There are many elements which work together to foster the development of such a community. One of the most important elements is caring. As Michael Lerner, founder of Commonweal has observed, simply caring for people in a very intense way characteristically produces very important and lasting shifts in people’s experience of their illness.

According to Rachel Naomi Remen, medical director for Commonweal, healing is evoking the



*Co-facilitators Wanda Barr and Kathy Fletcher.*

before I heard the word spoken. Shekinah was incorporated as a Canadian non-profit organization in June 1998.

Shekinah’s mission statement is to promote healing and wholeness by tending the soul, enriching the mind, nurturing the body and delighting the spirit. We engage in our mission by providing a variety of retreats. In developing our programs, we have drawn upon the organic metaphor of nurturing people



will to live in another human being. She believes that the will to live is evoked not by doing something but rather by simply receiving another person. This occurs when we let another person know that their pain, their suffering and their fear matter.

The retreat experience begins by teaching one of the most powerful techniques of healing: simply listening to others. In the words of Dr. Remen, "one of the greatest gifts you can give another person is your attention." It is in facing their illness together and in sharing their stories that a common bond forms within this tiny retreat community. It is this bond that helps transform the group into a healing community.

Most of the women have come to the retreat looking for an opportunity to open up and talk more freely about their experience of breast cancer. While many of them are part of a breast cancer support group that meets regularly, what they hope to experience at the retreat is a deeper level of sharing. Many of the women do not always feel they can share the depth of their experience with their families. Frightened themselves, family members are not always capable of hearing about the terror a person diagnosed with cancer might experience.

Receiving a diagnosis of cancer often leaves a person feeling as though their world has been turned upside down and everything that once gave their life meaning is now in jeopardy. Michael Lerner says "when people get a diagnosis of cancer their whole world turns over but it opens up an opportunity to look at life anew and that opportunity is often missed." These women do not want to miss that opportunity. They come seeking insights into the questions of the meaning of life. "What's it all about?" "What am I supposed to do now?" "What's my purpose?"

Some of the women come seeking inner peace and an opportunity to take a break from the responsibilities

of daily life. Another important element in the retreat experience is deep relaxation. There are many studies which indicate an important connection between stress, anxiety and illness. In the retreat, a gentle and meditative form of yoga is introduced in combination with deep relaxation exercises and meditation. As an additional nurturing gesture, each person is gently tucked in with a cosy blanket in preparation for the meditation.

The meditation experience affords the opportunity for the unconscious to begin to reveal itself. Throughout the retreat, participants are encouraged to listen carefully to the expression of their soul which often uses the language of the arts - music, creative writing, and art. The soul also speaks to us through dreams, imagery and nature. One of the exercises in the retreat is the creation of a group sand tray where each woman places objects of symbolic significance.

Touch is a very old way of healing and it plays an important role in creating a healing community. Touch can be deeply reassuring. Dr. Remen believes that there is something about touch that strengthens the will to live in us. In this retreat, each person is

offered an opportunity to experience Sacred Touch. Similar to Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, Sacred Touch is a prayerful meditation that uses touch to encourage the body to relax and to be nurtured and nourished.

Caring, listening, nurturing the body, relaxation, inviting the unconscious to reveal itself and touch - these are all building blocks which work together in the creation of a healing community. And yet, there is something more at work when one steps forth with the intention of healing. Beneath these blocks is a foundation which is sometimes difficult to articulate. It is what shifts these retreats to the realm of the spiritual.

In my understanding, spirituality has to do with connectedness - how we connect to each other, to the rest of creation, and to whatever reality we perceive as beyond ourselves. During these retreats, we intentionally create an opportunity for the participants in the group to connect with each other. In addition to this, it is our deepest desire that we may also feel connected to the presence of the divine. As retreat directors, we carry this intention and desire from the moment we begin the planning stages.

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One of the bedrock beliefs of Shekinah is that healing is a divine gift and birthright. Above all, healing as restoration to balance, harmony and wholeness is the will of the divine. As directors of the Foundation we constantly seek to be in alignment with the will of the divine and to carry this vision forth in our work. It is through careful attention to the divine presence that we hope to create an environment for the participants to open, discover, release, forgive, and experience the divine. This, we believe, is where spiritual healing begins.

The group sand tray serves as an illustration of this powerful spiritual healing concept. Several days before the retreat, each woman is asked to begin gathering things - simple items that come from the space in which they journey on a day-to-day basis. The women are encouraged to pay attention to the space where they live, to look carefully at the world which surrounds them, and bring the things that seem to want to come on the retreat. The women continue to gather items during the retreat, paying careful attention to that which attracts them.

Near the end of the retreat, the sand tray exercise takes place. The space is carefully prepared - a round table divided by string into pie-shaped

sections. A lighted candle is placed in the centre. A brief meditation is introduced and a question is raised: what is the meaning or purpose of your life? With this question in mind and a basket in hand, the women gather their symbols. When they are finished, they place the symbols on the table. They include pictures of family, stones, blue candles, a book of autographs from school days, wedding rings and family rings, dried flowers, a plant, a budding branch, animals and fish, a frilly straw hat, several angels, a monkey shaman and a frog.

Each woman then tells her story using the symbols as a guide. After each story has been shared, the group is invited to stand and join hands. Then, they move gradually around the circle in order to view the table from several different perspectives. Eventually, they arrive back "home." At this time, they are then invited to remove the string that separates each individual section of the table.


It is precisely at this moment that one might hear the breath of the divine. Suddenly, each woman realizes that her story is part of a larger story as yet unfolding. The boundaries dividing one from the other are gone and the feeling of deep connectedness is palpable. All at once, they realize that

their fears, their pains, their jobs and their triumphs are all one. They are not alone. Indeed, their experience of the strength and the fragility of human life has drawn them together. But more than this, on this simple round table there is a visible connection to that which is beyond. In the midst of the table two stones stand side by side. Two very special stones stand as symbols of two friends who died from breast cancer four short months ago. All at once, their presence becomes very real. The bridge between life and death has become tangible. And at this moment, the open wound of grief and mortality begins to heal.


As the retreat experience draws to a close, the full blue moon begins its ascent into the twilight sky above PCTC. It is a time to witness a rare human phenomenon - the spiritual connection that holds us all together with great tenderness.

*Kathy Fletcher is a founding director of the Shekinah Foundation for Healing and Wholeness. A Doctoral Candidate at St. Stephen's College of the University of Alberta, she is deeply interested in the connections between spirituality and wellness. Kathy lives in Regina where she serves as minister to Eastside United Church.*

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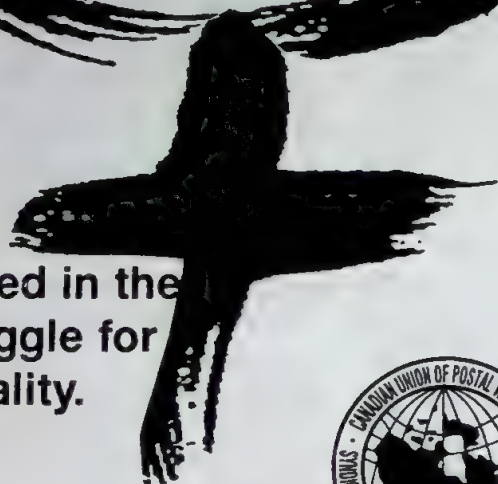
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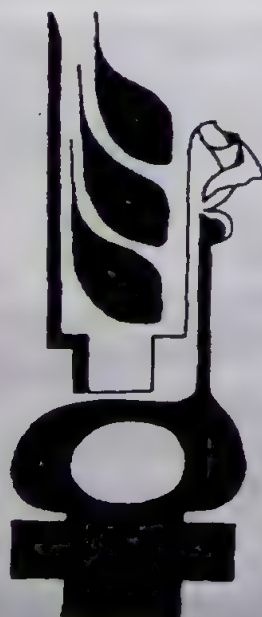
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# Midwifery

## A matter of control.

by Lori A. Stinson O'Gorman

**L**ike most issues in women's health, and in particular reproductive health, the debate around the legalization of midwifery appears to be centering on the issue of "choice" - choice in venue, choice in practitioners, choice in the means by which we shall be delivered from the constraints of our biology. In reality, "choice"

is what we are left with when we have already lost control. Choice becomes the mechanism, or perhaps the last recourse, of the loss of control of our own bodies.

A few radical midwives believe that we lose meaningful control of our reproductive capacities precisely through the contemporary processes of legalization and professionalization. We peacefully request an extension of our limited choice where we should have raging debates on the means by which we can wrest control of our bodies and our birthing process away from institutionalized medicine. The debate around the legalization of midwifery should not be centered on extending our choices, rather it should be grounded in the struggle for meaningful control over our own bodies.

If I have meaningful control over



my body and the birthing of my baby, I ease my baby into the world: she or he is not delivered from me by a doctor, intern or a midwife; I am not told how I am progressing, I tell, with assistance if I need or want it; there are no drugs or unnecessary interventions to thwart the imperatives of my biology; the focus of labouring and birth is not my uterus and vagina, it is my baby and me; we are not surrounded by strangers and a sterile environment, we are surrounded by our family or friends in a secure, safe and welcoming environment; I am not limited by arbitrary notions of what constitutes "normal" pregnancy and delivery, it is recognized that normal pregnancy and delivery is as varied as the women who accomplish it. This is what the struggle to legalize midwifery should be about. If this is the focus of the de-

bate, choice is implicit. I do not need to fight for choice if I have control.

Too often the debate has been side-tracked over issues of safety. Images of our foremothers killed during childbirth are held up as a warning to those who would speak against the "advances" of modern medical technology. Such scare-mongering fails to recognize the impact on maternal and infant mortality of widespread poverty, malnourishment, harsh working class lives, and patriarchal religious strictures which deny a woman the right to say "no", and bizarre Victorian and contemporary ideals of the female body. Various agencies employ grossly misleading statistics comparing "emergency" births (not planned homebirths) with supposedly safe hospital births. In those countries where women can enjoy planned homebirths with a midwife, homebirth is *at least* as safe as conventional hospital birth. According to Henci Goer, in the book *Obstetric Myths versus Research Realities: A Guide to the Medical Literature*, "Studies consistently show that midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth are safer for most mothers and babies." Successful species do not



evolve unable to birth their own young. The essential safety of natural childbirth is a mantra from which proponents of midwifery must never retreat in the current debates around legalization.

For many, midwifery is not simply an occupation. It is a philosophy of pregnancy, birth, maternal and infant care. As Pat Sonnenstuhl writes, "the Midwifery Model is an attitude about women and how pregnancy and birth occur, and a view that pregnancy

and birth are normal events until proven otherwise. It is an attitude of giving and sharing information, of empowerment, and of respecting the right of a woman and her family to determine their own care." (Midwifery: Introduction FAQ, USENET: sci.med.midwifery). The role of the midwife is not to preside over the pregnancy and birth, but rather to assist the woman, through sharing information and providing direct care when needed, in presiding over her own

pregnancy, birth and post-natal period.

The only way to really understand what the midwifery movement could mean, as part of the larger women's struggle for control over our bodies, is to examine our experiences with pregnancy and birth and compare them with what *we know* we need and want. What is it like to be the one in control of our own reproductive capacities? Why do we hand control over to another? Are we afraid of the responsibility attached to such control or are we simply too accustomed to being denied it?

We need to refocus the current struggle for the legalization of midwifery. The apparent victory of legalized midwifery must not result in midwifery services ending up in the same boat as other reproductive rights issues: women winning the dubious right to a choice of no choice. I do not want to be left choosing the lesser of the sanctioned evils when it comes to choosing how to bring my child into the world. If I have meaningful control over my own reproductive capacities, be they birth control, abortion, birthing or menopause, I do not require the permission of any medical establishment in exercising my choice nor do I need to be liberated from by biol-

ogy. I only appear to require liberation from my biology when others use it as an excuse for my oppression. As women we are only imprisoned by our reproductive capacities when we hand control of those capacities over to another. If we embrace control, we embrace liberation, first as individuals, then potentially as a collective.

*Lori Stinson O'Gorman is a veteran of two homebirths, both illegal.*

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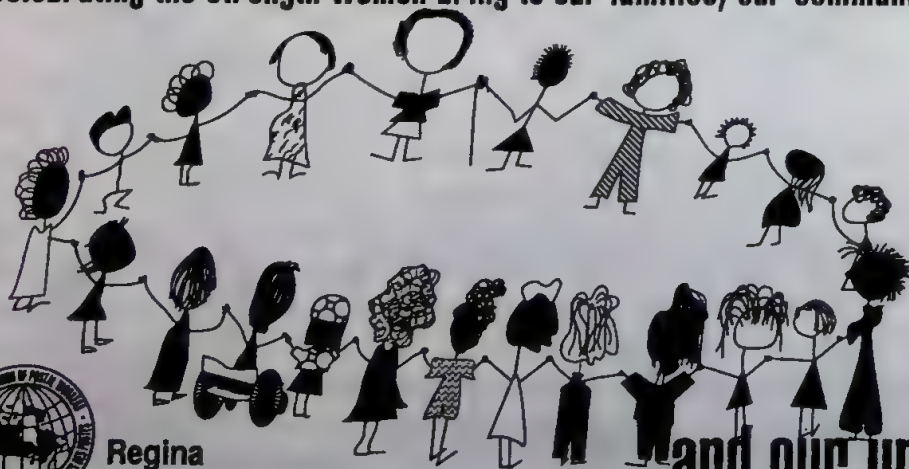
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## International ♀'s Day

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# Healing Indigenous Communities

by Priscilla Settee

When I first thought about the idea of a book about women's healing, I wanted it to be a celebration of the work that Indigenous women are doing locally and internationally. I also recognized the healing ability of putting thoughts into writing. I then happened to mention my idea to a *Briarpatch* board member and next I knew I was commissioned to write an article. I thought of the immense breadth and quality of stories of the women with whom I work and admire locally and internationally, and thought it would be a good opportunity to let others know about them and their work. This article is a precursor to the book which will be produced fairly shortly.

Much of the work that women have undertaken, focuses on the building and caring aspects of community. Much of women's thought and action comes from a perspective of sharing, discussion and reflection. It is women who have established all battered

women's shelters. It is primarily women like Elder Vicki Wilson and Myrna Yuzicapi who were the backbone of the Survival School movement in Saskatoon in the 1970s. Women like Bernice Sayese from Prince Albert who has been a long time advocate of community and Aboriginal rights.

Women like Miliani Trask, lawyer, human rights activist, and leader of the largest Hawaiian Indigenous group who has just recently been elected by her community as one of the seven trustees (a governor-like position). Lesser known women like Sally McKenzie from tiny Grandmother's Bay in northern Saskatchewan who works to create a better community through her work with youth and elders.

When I look around at the work that these women do in the name of improving their communities, I ask myself what has happened that requires these women to do this type of work? Why is it that we spend so much

of our time on work which I consider cleaning up and mending problems created by larger sociopolitical systems?

I believe that the topic of healing and women's stories must be presented within both a personal and political context and that is how the book will be presented. When asked to describe her amazing legacy of work, Bernice Sayese describes her early years of political awakening, working for Community Switchboard in Prince Albert. It was here she worked with people who helped her see the local conditions of poor people within a larger political context. Later Bernice would take her talents to organize community kitchens which encouraged women to come out of their isolation and through food preparation, help them nourish their families as well as their spirits. Through the establishment of community kitchens many women achieved confidence to take on leadership roles within their commu-



nities.

Women are reclaiming knowledge which was once the mainstay of community values and healing. Groups like Wainamate, in Fiji in the South Pacific, are returning to ancestral Indigenous knowledge. This healing knowledge requires less dependence on western medicines which are expensive and not always available. Reclamation of this knowledge is a very political act in the exercise of sovereignty. As more and more plants and their healing properties come under the microscope of pharmaceutical companies, Indigenous people have had to work hard to ensure that their intellectual property rights are not usurped or taken out of control of their communities. This is no easy feat. The wealth that global Indigenous knowledge represented in one year alone was \$40 billion, according to the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs. Less than one percent of that was enjoyed by Indigenous communities.

Winona LaDuke is an Anishnabekwe woman from the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. She dedicates her amazing energy to creating community-based economic development projects in her community. She was a recipient of the Reebok Human Rights Award and used the money from that to establish the White Earth Land Council. Today this Council has become a viable business, producing wild rice, raspberries and maple syrup. She was selected as one of several young leaders of the year by *Time* magazine and along with Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, was chosen to give the keynote address at the Beijing Women's conference. Winona believes in community development from the ground up as a means of healing communities fractured by colonial forms of government.

Recently I have been an active North American board member of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP). This organization was estab-

lished over 20 years ago to address the aftermath of the nuclear explosions by the French, American and British governments in the South Pacific over 40 years ago. The impact of those explosions have been nothing less than the worst form of genocide and human rights abuses. To this day women still give birth to live jelly fish babies who are sometimes born with no arms, legs, or heads or even faces with monkey features or fish heads. Sometimes the malformed human babies are taken away to be injected to die so that the horrified parents do not have to suffer any longer.

In addition to addressing the horrible aftermath of nuclear devastation, the NFIP works on a myriad of issues which plague colonially-governed Indigenous lands, particularly the impact of the process of globalization. Globalization is characterized by high unemployment and rapid resource extraction, with the benefits going elsewhere. All types of mining, clearcutting and other forms of resource extraction are typical of the type of development which takes place on Indigenous lands. While it is true that some jobs accrue, the impact of the development must be weighed against destruction to the environment and the loss of traditional land use.

The impact of mining on Indigenous communities has been so great that an international body was formed two years ago. One of the leaders is Cree lawyer Sharon Venne of the Joseph Bighead First Nations. Sharon has been active at the international level for decades, in work around the establishment of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Sharon and others have helped establish a "mining hot spot" list. This list informs the broader public of communities where mining is leading to human rights abuses against Indigenous communities. The initial mining meeting was financed with the assistance of the World Council of Churches. Sharon recognizes the sense of hope-

lessness which results from the form of "development" that takes place on Indigenous lands and that communities such as the Lubicon Cree face.

Women are making a vast difference both locally and internationally. Women have recognized the need to heal individuals as well as communities and have taken their struggle from the personal into the political and global realms. I have only described a few activities of a few of the many wise, wonderful and courageous women who are creating a better world for future generations. One publication which records the work that women are undertaking is the *Indigenous Women's Network Magazine* which is produced by the Indigenous Peoples Program at the Extension Division of the University of Saskatchewan.

*Priscilla Settee's book of stories on women's healing will be called Akameyimow (Persistence) and will be published by Extension Press at the University of Saskatchewan to coincide with the new millennium. For more information on this book and other publications, Priscilla Settee can be reached at the Indigenous Peoples Program at the University of Saskatchewan. Phone (306) 966-5556.*

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# Power to the Provinces?

*Questioning the "new" social union.*

by David Robinson

**T**he social union deal signed by Ottawa and the provinces in February has been proudly trumpeted by nearly everyone involved. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien called the deal a victory for Canada. "It's a tremendous day," concurred a beaming Mike Harris with fellow premiers Roy Romanow and Glen Clark by his side. Hell, even some progressive activists called the deal a step forward.

In truth, there is much to be concerned about the social union agreement. Yes, the deal could have been much worse. The provinces didn't wrestle complete control of social programs from Ottawa. The accord is largely administrative and not constitutionally enshrined, at least not yet. At it will last for only three years.

Nonetheless, the social union agreement does represent a step backward for social policy in Canada. While it was difficult enough to get Ottawa to address the urgent social needs of Canadians before the deal was signed, now it will be much harder.

## National social standards at risk

The social union agreement involves a further decentralization of social policy and a weakening of national social standards. In fact, "standards" have now been replaced with "priorities" and each province is given the right to design and deliver programs according to "its own needs and circumstances."



The REPUBLICANADIANS

In practice this will certainly make it much more difficult for Ottawa to prevent provinces from charging user fees for health services or privatizing hospitals. In fact, the key objective of the provinces in the talks was to diminish the federal role in social programs, and particularly Medicare. You can almost envision the press conference now where Ralph Klein tells Albertans that current "needs and circumstances" require two-tier health care.

## New national programs derailed

The social union accord, while recognizing Ottawa's right to fund social programs, places new limits on federal spending powers. The end result is that the federal government will be prevented from initiating any new cost-shared programs without the majority consent of the provinces.

In practice, of course, this requirement will effectively derail any new national programs. When Medicare was first established in 1968, for instance, only two provinces





- Saskatchewan and British Columbia - agreed to take part. If the social union deal had been in place then, Medicare would have been a non-starter.

Beyond this, any new programs will have to respect the rights of provinces to design those programs in a manner they see fit. To get a taste of what this means, look at the failings of the new National Child Benefit (NCB) program - a program championed by those in favour of a more flexible and decentralized approach to social policy.

Beginning in July 1998, the NCB combined and increased the value of two existing programs, the Child Tax Benefit and the Working Income Supplement. This was not, however, a case of Ottawa loosening its purse strings. Tied to the increased federal credits was a more troubling provision: as the federal benefit increases, provinces and territories can decrease benefits for social assistance recipients. The funds that the provinces and territories save on welfare are supposed to be "reinvested" in other programs and services for low-income families and children. However, there is no agreed upon set of standards on where or how or even whether the "reinvestment" will take place. Provinces are free to decide what to do with the savings. Some may opt to provide more services such as publicly-provided child care. Others, such as Ontario and Alberta, have decided to offer further

tax credits to fund for-profit child care. Or, provinces may simply pocket the savings.

No matter where or if the money is spent, the end result is clear. Hopes for the creation of a common set of services for all Canadian children, such as a national day care program, have been dashed by the NCB. Instead, we have a patchwork of different, and largely inadequate, programs across the country. Thanks to the social union accord, similar initiatives such as Pharmacare or Homecare likely await the same fate.

### An undemocratic process

In its 1996 Speech from the Throne, the federal Liberal government promised it would "work with the provinces and Canadians to develop by mutual consent the values, principles and objectives that should underlie, first the Canada Health and Social Transfer and, building on this, the social union more generally." Similarly, all provincial premiers promised that Canadians would be consulted on the social union talks. Yet no serious consultations took place.

Meanwhile, powerful economic interests enjoyed privileged access to the discussions. The Business Council on National Issues issued a memo on the social union that, with only minor modifications, was released by the premiers and territorial leaders as the Calgary Declaration.

Why were Ottawa and the provinces reluctant to open





up the social union process and consult with Canadians? Could it be that the position of the provincial premiers on this issue simply runs counter to public opinion in English Canada?

### Quebec's demands remain unsatisfied

The social union accord was supposed to address Quebec's historic demands for greater power and autonomy. But once again Quebec stood alone and was left out.

That should come as little surprise given that the premise of decentralization is that Quebec should be accommodated by treating all provinces as if they were Quebec. This strategy is deeply flawed. It provides a remarkably narrow recognition of Quebec's distinctiveness and undermines the common social rights of other Canadians. It is a tired and failed formula, one that was roundly rejected in the Charlottetown Agreement referendum.

### Power to the marketplace

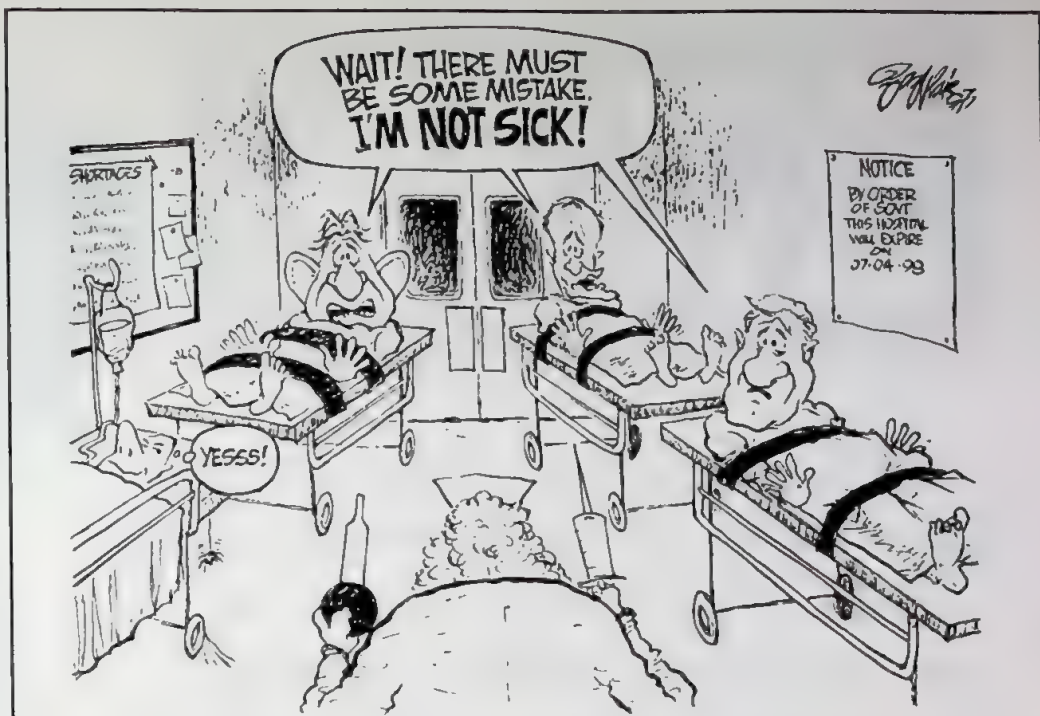
The social union deal is about far more than federal-provincial wrangling over constitutional powers. What's at stake is not just the devolution of responsibilities from one level of government to another, but a fundamental realignment of power from governments to markets.

On this mark, the social union agreement is surprisingly explicit. It requires the provinces to live up to commitments made in the recently signed Agreement on Internal Trade and reduce "barriers" to the mobility of Canadians and "other entities" - that is, large corporations. And just what might these barriers be? Labour standards, environmental safeguards, government regulations and other social protections.

The social union accord furthers the drive of the corporate lobby to create a deregulated economic space for private business, while steadily weakening the social security protections afforded working Canadians. It has weakened the federal government and increased the power of the private sector.

### Beyond the "New" Social Union

The dangers raised by the social union are clear. It is unconscionable that such a fundamental shift in the economic and social structure of Canada has been negotiated



"THAT'S NOT WHAT CANADIAN PATIENTS ARE TELLING ME...NOW TAKE YOUR MEDICINE!"

without any serious consultation with Canadians or with other key stakeholders in the process, including Aboriginal peoples.

At the same time, progressive Canadians need to recognize that the status quo will not do. While the further devolution of social policy to all provincial governments, and ultimately to the private sector, has to be resisted, change is needed. But a new approach is required that will protect and promote the social rights of Canadians and recognize the expressed desires for Quebecers and First Nations for self-determination.

Tentatively, such an approach would need to start with a clear understanding of the distinctive traditions of English Canada, Quebecers and Aboriginal peoples. To do so is to recognize that there are three unique societies in Canada and that there is an overriding need to design programs and institutions for the protection of social rights in each society.

Currently, however, the federal government and the provincial governments are moving in a different direction. They have negotiated an overhaul of Canada's social programs that will further unravel the social safety net and shift more power to unaccountable private actors. It is time Canadians hold Ottawa and the provincial premiers accountable.

*David Robinson is senior policy analyst with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. This article is adapted from a longer report commissioned by the Council of Canadians.*



# IT'S PAYBACK TIME



**In 1990, 87% of jobless Canadians qualified for unemployment insurance benefits. Now, after five years of Liberal "reform," only 36% qualify.**

The unemployment insurance (UI) program was created in the 1940s to help people during periods of unemployment. The Chretien government "modernized" the program. Now two out of three unemployed people aren't eligible for UI coverage.

By denying benefits to the jobless, the government has created a \$20 billion surplus in the UI fund. The government has been using the surplus to balance the federal books. Under the renamed Employment Insurance Act, the government must repay the money with interest.

Hundreds of thousands of working people and unemployed Canadians who have financed the UI fund through premiums have a message for the government: ***"It's payback time."*** ***We want the Chretien Liberals to restore benefits to the unemployed, repay the \$20 billion they have borrowed and create an Independent UI Commission.***

If you're concerned about the way the Chretien Liberals are handling the unemployment insurance account, let them know.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6  
Phone: 613-992-4211  
Fax: 613-941-6900

Finance Minister Paul Martin  
Esplanade Laurier, E. Tower, 21st Floor  
140 O'Connor St., Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5  
Phone: 613-996-7861  
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# Manufacturing Majorities

by Phil Johnson

So often as to be almost always, our electoral system gives power to the party most people don't want.

The 1997 federal election is a case in point. It is not an exceptional case; it is more the rule. Thirty-eight percent of voters decided the Liberal Party should govern the nation. Thirty-eight percent were allowed to do this by entering their votes into our "first past the post" electoral processor which reassembled the votes into 155 seats in Parliament (out of a possible 301). That's a majority government for the Liberals. They received the most votes of the many parties in the race; they did not receive the support of the majority of voters.

The Liberal seats are concentrated in Ontario. There, upon receiving 49 percent of the popular vote, the lucky Liberals won 101 out of the province's 103 federal seats. The 51 percent of Ontario voters that did not choose the Liberals were allowed to fill exactly two seats with their representatives.

Saskatchewan results from the 1997 election were only slightly less distorted. Here, the Reform Party won the support of 36 percent of voters, yet took 57 percent of the Saskatchewan seats in Parliament; the Liberals took 25 percent of the popular vote, but received only one seat.

It is our electoral system, not the voter that produces the phenomenon of the 38 percent majority.

We use a plurality system, known as "first past the post" (FPTP). It works like this: there are 301 seats in Parliament, with each seat reserved for one representative from



each of the 301 constituencies in Canada. We have representation by population, sort of, so that each constituency has relatively the same number of potential voters. When we enter the polling booth, we mark our "X" for the candidate we want to represent our constituency. Usually we have a choice of three, four, five or even more candidates. The single candidate receiving the most "Xs" becomes the Member of Parliament for the constituency. The party with the most representatives in Parliament will become government if it has more than 50 percent of the seats. Because we have a multi-party system (five parties in Parliament currently),

with numerous parties and candidates contesting each constituency, the winning candidate seldom has the support of over half the voters. As a result, most people will not have voted for candidates of the winning party, even though that party's candidates won the majority of the constituency races.

Some might conclude then, that the problem is not with FPTP, but that we have too many parties, that the number of parties should be restricted to two. In fact, the FPTP system is designed to punish third (and fourth and fifth) parties for daring to enter the contest. In fact, it does punish them, usually by awarding them fewer seats than their percentage of the vote would say is warranted. Nevertheless, third, fourth, and fifth parties stubbornly insist on running, and regularly receive a large share of the vote. The multi-party system is here to stay.

FPTP is designed to manufacture majority govern-



ments, even if they don't have majority support. Consider its roots – 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, where Parliament was a club of gentlemen and the right to vote was severely limited by bloodline and wealth. To proponents of this system, the goal was, and is, to create a strong, single-party government capable of pushing through its policies. They call it “uncompromised government.” (The 1988 federal election returned Brian Mulroney uncompromised and gave us free trade based on 43 percent of popular support). Proponents of FPTP do not mind that our majority governments – federal or provincial – almost never reflect the majority will. They don't think of the electoral system as being about political equality, or about giving voice to minorities, or about making all votes count, or about electing a Parliament that is truly representative of the people.

Many people in the world, however, do mind. They expect the electoral system to produce a government certainly; but they also expect it to produce a Parliament that reflects the populace and expresses its will.

Most European democracies abandoned the “uncompromised” model of government decades ago. Of the Western democracies, only Canada, the U.S. and Britain still cling to FPTP. Up until 1993, New Zealand was a member of the club, but a referendum that year threw out FPTP in favour of German-style proportional representation (PR). Britain is also edging toward the club house door. PR will be used in upcoming elections in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and is used to elect British

representatives to the European Parliament. Just recently, the Jenkins Commission proposed a version of PR for national elections in Britain, albeit a watered-down version. The British people will decide in a referendum which electoral system they want – this was an election promise made by the Labour Party during the 1997 election campaign, following years of campaigning for PR by extra-parliamentary groups. (Ironically, the FPTP system gave Labour a majority hugely disproportionate to its share of the popular vote).

### Proportional Representation

So what is PR? Broadly speaking, PR awards seats in Parliament or the Legislature in proportion to the number of votes each party received in the election. This may be a radical notion for Canadian politics, but it is a prerequisite democratic requirement of electoral systems in most other countries. In the purest form of PR, a party receiving 38 percent of the votes will receive 38 percent of the seats in Parliament. Clearly, this is not a majority, and this party would have to form a coalition with another party or parties in order to gain majority support and the ability to govern. Coalition forming is a regular practice in countries using PR. While enthusiasts for FPTP would consider such coalition governments as “compromised” and “unstable,” proponents of PR say coalitions are more representative of political opinion in the country, and stable in countries like Germany, France, Sweden, and Norway.

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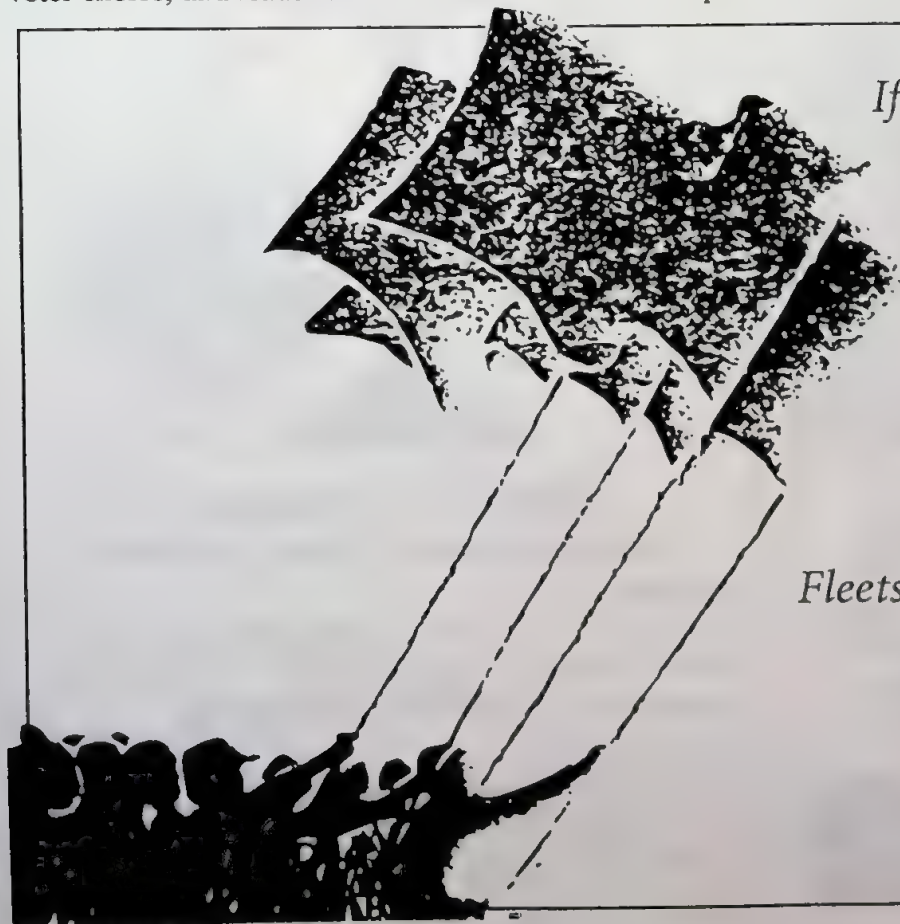
There are many forms of PR. The system selected by New Zealand is similar to that used in Germany. It works this way: half the members of Parliament are elected as representatives of single member constituencies, using FPTP (this is how Canadians vote); the other half of the members of Parliament are elected by PR, from a party list of candidates. In the polling booth, each voter marks two ballots, one for the individual candidate he or she wants to represent the constituency, and one for the party of preference.

The first ballot provides voters with a candidate who is accountable locally. It is the second ballot that ensures a proportional outcome (i.e. percentage of votes equals percentage of seats) by topping up each party's share of elected representatives according to the percentage of voters supporting each party.

In Canada, arguments to change the electoral system have quietly persisted and persistently been ignored. With each undemocratic election result comes a brief chorus of calls for change, which soon fade. Following the 1997 federal election, even the *Globe and Mail* floated a proposal for a system of PR. The 1970s Pepin-Robarts Commission prescribed PR for Canada. Political scientists and journalists and even the occasional politician have proposed PR.

There are many arguments for PR. It allows greater voter choice, and leads to a Parliament that is more repre-

sentative of the people it governs. It provides a greater incentive to vote (voter turnout in Canada reached a 72-year low in 1997, at 67 percent). Under PR, votes are not wasted, because a proportional result means that every vote counts. It allows more choice than simply to "hold my nose and vote for party A because I'm afraid of party B winning, and I know party C, my favourite, doesn't have a hope of winning." (However, most PR systems do require that parties receive specified minimum levels of support before they earn seats.)



*If we workers take a notion, we  
can stop all speeding trains  
Every ship upon the ocean  
we can tie with mighty  
chains  
Every wheel in the creation,  
every mine and every mill  
Fleets and armies of all nations will  
at our command stand still.*

—Joe Hill

*The Canadian Union  
of Postal Workers*





PR could break up the regional voting blocks that have arisen in Canada. The Reform Party is unwanted in Alberta by 45 percent of voters there, yet the province's representation in Parliament is solidly Reform blue and green. A proportional result in Alberta would give Reform only 55 percent of the seats, rather than the 92 percent they currently occupy in Parliament. The same argument applies to Quebec where the electoral system insists the province is Bloc blue, while the voters insist they support a variety of parties.

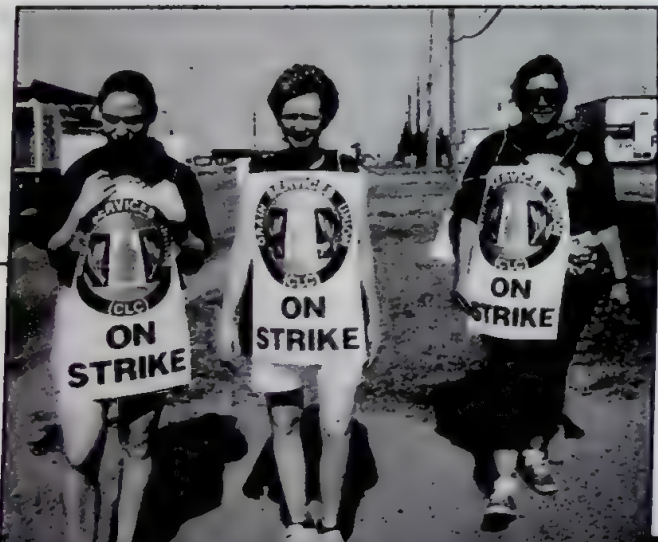
We should be careful, however, when looking at voter preferences under FPTP and extrapolating what the results would be under PR. A PR system would *allow* different voting choices. New parties may develop, or existing smaller parties may grow when voters realize that every vote will help determine the ultimate seat count in Parliament. PR would allow other voices – some of those currently ignored – to become participants in the political debate.

By now it should be clear that there is one large – very large – obstacle to changing the electoral system. Can we really expect that the government which rides to power on the distortions of the FPTP electoral system will volun-

tarily choose to abandon that system?

Before we get too depressed about the answer, we should remember that breakthroughs do happen. It was citizen movements that finally convinced parties and governments to change the electoral systems in New Zealand and Britain. In Canada, this could work, too. After all, women may now vote, trade unions enjoy legal rights, and healthcare was socialized because popular movements talked and argued and struggled and finally gathered enough support to pry open the club house door just a little wider.

*Phil Johnson is a member of the Briarpatch Board of Directors.*



Women play a key role in the struggle for economic equality and dignity.

The women and men of the Grain Services Union celebrate

**International Women's Day 1999**

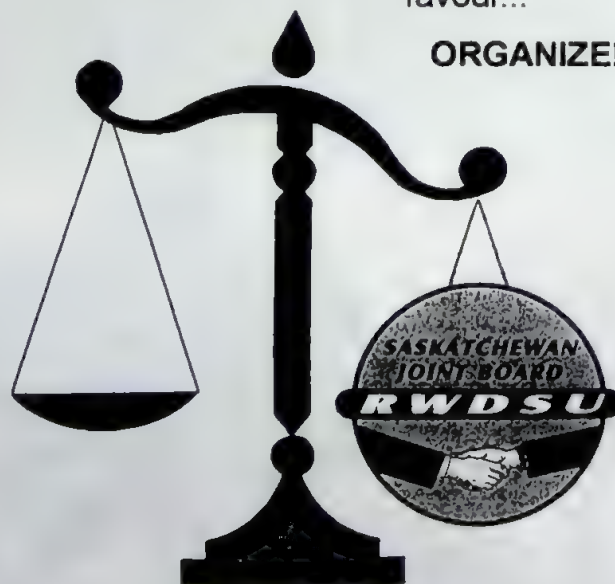


**PAY EQUITY NOW!**

**M**arch 8th is International Women's Day but in Saskatchewan there are over 72,000 women working part-time. Almost 50% earn less than \$7.00 an hour and 82% have no pension plan. It shouldn't come as a surprise that 76% have no union.

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# One True Thing

## One True Thing

by Anna Quindlen

Dell Publishing, New York, 1994,  
\$16.95.

reviewed by Cara Banks

*One True Thing* begins with a young woman, Ellen Gulden, charged with the murder of her mother, who has died of a drug overdose after an intense battle with cancer. The book then flashes back to tell the story of the months leading up to her death.

You might read this book as a touching story of how a mother and daughter's previously strained relationship is transformed by illness. You might also read it as a suspense novel (the details of the mother's death are revealed only at the very end). Being trained in women's studies, I read *One True Thing* (and saw the movie) and thought about the role gender plays in it: apparently, caring for the dying is a woman's job.

Ellen has always had a poor relationship with her mother. Ellen's cold and ambitious personality clashes with her mother's sunny disposition, and she never respected her mother's choice to work at home. Yet Ellen's father informs her she must interrupt her burgeoning career as a journalist to take care of her mother, and in turn take over her mother's former role as homemaker to her family. Interestingly, Ellen's two brothers, who are very close to their mother, are not required to take time off from university. To make matters worse, Ellen's boyfriend more or less disappears.

Ellen's father is remarkably absent through his wife's chemotherapy treatments and all the stages of her slow death. His university career and extra-curricular activities take clear

precedence. "It was a world without men too, with my brothers gone away and my father scarcely there, letting my mother take care of her own disintegration as she'd taken care of her house, her children, the life which she had devoted to him." Both Ellen and her mother's lives are drastically altered, but the men in their family go on with their lives relatively undisturbed.

At one point Ellen blows up at her boyfriend for defending her father's absence: "Whenever one of you guys say people deal with bad stuff in their own way, it means you don't deal with it at all. You just wait for it to go away. You don't help. You don't listen. You don't call. You don't write. WE deal with it in our own way. WE deal with it. We girls. We make the meals and clean up the messes and take the crap and listen to you talk about how you're dealing with it in your own way."

Where are the men in this story? Why must Ellen bear the incredible emotional, physical, and mental burden of caring for her dying mother by

herself? Quindlen takes us right to the heart of Ellen's isolation, her fears, and her anger at her father.

During this enormous emotional struggle, Ellen and her mother grow closer and Ellen learns to honour her mother's life choices. Indeed, Ellen reevaluates her own life and choices in the process. To be the lifeline of the woman who gave you life is shown to be truly a transformative experience.

With great emotional clarity, this book demonstrates that while women by and large are responsible for caregiving, with the resulting physical and emotional exhaustion, this experience can be tremendously rewarding as well. If more men shared in these responsibilities, they would not only lighten the burdens of the women in their lives, they would also see that there is something about caring for the dying that teaches us lessons about how to live.

*Cara Banks highly recommends the movie One True Thing, in video stores March 16th.*

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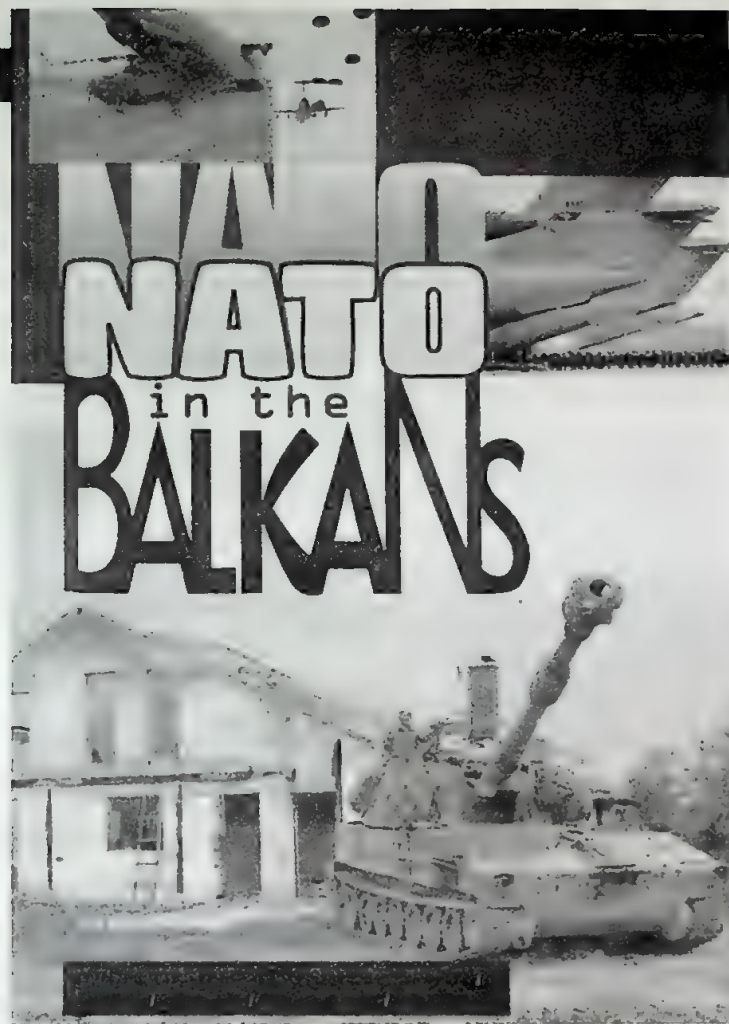
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reviewed by Terry Wolfwood

The 13 authors of *NATO in the Balkans* - from the U.S., Great Britain and Canada - present vastly different information and analysis about the breakup and civil wars in the former Yugoslavia compared to anything we find in the mainstream media.

The International Action Center is a citizen activist group, formed in 1991 to oppose the U.S./U.N. war against Iraq. It continues this work, opposing military action and sanctions, publishing books on the war, and organizing citizen actions such as medical shipments to oppose the U.S. blockades against Cuba and Iraq.

The U.S. and Germany planned to destabilize Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and help secessions that broke up

Yugoslavia's sovereignty. Before that breakup, the U.S. Congress signed Law 101-513 in 1990, ending aid, credits and loans to Yugoslavia, demanding separate American-approved elections in each state, after which the Americans might give aid to states that the U.S. defined as "democratic." It also urged agencies like the IMF and World Bank to follow suit.

Quoting a 1992 Pentagon document which outlined U.S. policy to control both NATO and the world, this book shows how the U.S. planned to destroy Yugoslavia's socialism, and, with Germany's help, to break down the power of the Slavs in Europe, forming a Balkan free-market economy. The U.S. also created a new NATO role: "out-of-area" expansion.

We know Canada's role here - justifying NATO, defence spending and "peacekeeping."

When I look at the power of the American military, economic and media juggernaut both within the U.S. and world-wide (particularly in Canada), it's hard to feel hopeful. But when I read this well written and documented book exposing the U.S. government, and when I think of the brave American citizens who defy their own government and help the Iraqi and Cuban people, I am heartened. I think of the many Canadian and American citizens' groups who helped stop the MAI and continue to

oppose globalization, of people everywhere coming together to create a world of peace and justice. I know we are in good company in a struggle that will be won.

*Terry Wolfwood works for the Barnard-Boecker Centre Foundation in Victoria, B.C.*



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# Redwood Cathedral

**Redwood Cathedral**  
A CD by Dick Gaughan  
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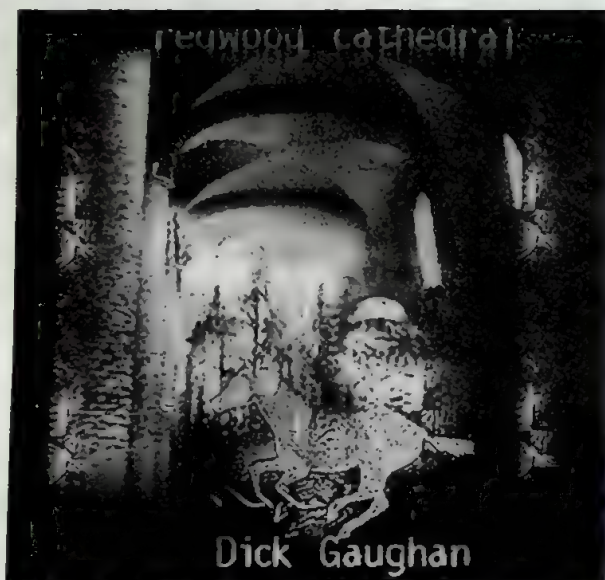
reviewed by Norm Walker

If you were looking for a great artist with a poetic vision, an extremely talented guitarist, a singer with phenomenal vocal control, a politically progressive humanist and a proud Scottish nationalist, you would find all this and a lot more in the personage of Dick Gaughan. He is someone who uses traditional music as a point of reference, but is not bound by it. For most of the past 20 years, we have come to expect that he will approach his music in a principled, thoughtful and tasteful manner, in search of truth and always true to himself. *Redwood Cathedral* is no exception to this.

Previous albums by Dick Gaughan have mostly been a mixture of traditional songs and tunes, creations by his contemporaries, and material that he constructed or reconstructed himself. He is the first to admit that there are very few "original" songs being created today, most being variations and re-combinations of things that have been around for years. *Redwood Cathedral* is an album with only two of his "originals." The other ten songs mostly pay tribute to great people, characters in the songs, or the songwriters, each having attained a measure of greatness themselves. So in a way this is a tribute album, perhaps more so this is a salute to some of those people for whom Dick

Gaughan himself has a powerful respect and awe.

The title, *Redwood Cathedral*, comes from the song "Muir and the



Master Builder" by Brian McNeill who also penned another of the fine selections here, "Ewan and the Gold." The first is an awe inspiring song about John Muir, "the instigator in the National Parks system in the USA." The second stirs many mixed emotions, including awe, in telling the life story of Ewan Gillies, who paid dearly (in many ways) for leaving Scotland in search of gold.

Dick Gaughan displays the highest respect for the writers of all the songs he covers. This is perhaps most apparent on "Pancho and Lefty" by Townes Van Zandt, "Turn, Turn, Turn" by Pete Seeger (and whoever wrote that book called *Ecclesiastes*), "Gone, Gonna Rise Again" by Si Khan and "October Song" by Robin Williamson. Each of the writers has had a marked effect on Gaughan's life, music and outlook.

"Reconciliation" by Ron Kavana and "Thomas Muir of Huntershill" by

Adam McNaughton are two songs that speak directly of political issues. The first is about modern day Ireland and the second is about 18th century Scotland, but it is also relevant today.

The two songs by Dick Gaughan himself are "Why Old Men Cry" and "All the King's Horses." The first is a personal distillation of many things - war, economic devastation and their effects on people in Scotland. The second is superficially about British politics but has much wider implications and appeal. It's also the only song on the album that is set in a rock genre.

Perhaps the most touching tribute by Gaughan is to the writer of the haunting last track "Fine Horseman." Lal Waterson was a part of the famed and influential Watsonsons, a family group of traditional singers from England. She passed on fairly suddenly in September 1998. The inclusion of this song here appears to be an unintentional and coincidental final gesture of deep regret.

The old pop standard "Let It Be Me" may seem a little out of place here but with Dick Gaughan you can be sure there is a good reason for it. He might say something like "just because."

It is highly unlikely that any of these songs were chosen lightly. Each of them have moving poetic images, depth and meaning. Each is beautifully woven to an appropriately artistic melody. Each comes from the hand of a master and is reinterpreted by another master - Dick Gaughan.

*Norm Walker is an electrician, musician, songwriter, and long-time folk music enthusiast.*



## SUHARTO SINGS THE BLUES

"He is a former president. How come you don't believe a statement from Suharto?"

- Andi Muhammad Ghalib,  
Indonesian attorney general. On a private TV channel partly owned by his eldest daughter, Suharto dismissed an investigation into his family's multi-billion dollar business empire. "The fact is, I don't even have one cent of savings abroad, don't have accounts at foreign banks, don't have deposits abroad and don't even have shares in foreign firms, much less hundreds of billions of dollars."

## WRONG AGAIN BARBARA

"General Pinochet is being prosecuted not for his alleged crimes, but for being on the wrong side...."

By the time of the coup, political assassination squads from the extreme Left were a fact of life in Chile, while Allende had about 15,000 illegal militiamen armed and trained with Cuban weapons."

Barbara Amiel,  
National Post, December 12, 1998.

## PINKO COMMIE FARMERS

"But Mr. Estey's claims will sweep into the crypto-Marxist world of the wheat board and its acolytes in the National Farmers Union, the Prairie wheat pools and Saskatchewan's NDP like a Prairie dust storm. The wheat board still tries to sell farmers on the lie that its 'single-desk selling system' (its legislated power to expropriate grain) provides 'market power' (a cartel-like ability to elevate world grain prices), and that this is where farmers' welfare lies."

- George Koch,  
Calgary correspondent for the National Post,  
January 6, 1999.

## GIT YER GUN!

"The banning of the bear season just doesn't help the bears. It only helps the touchy-feely fantasy of a bunch of people who would ban you and I from ever wearing leather or having a steak...."

You want to have the bears run rampant? Then you go ahead and figure out how to get them out of people's dumpsters and people's back yards. And you explain to the lady why Fifi just got gobbled up by an overpopulation of black bears."

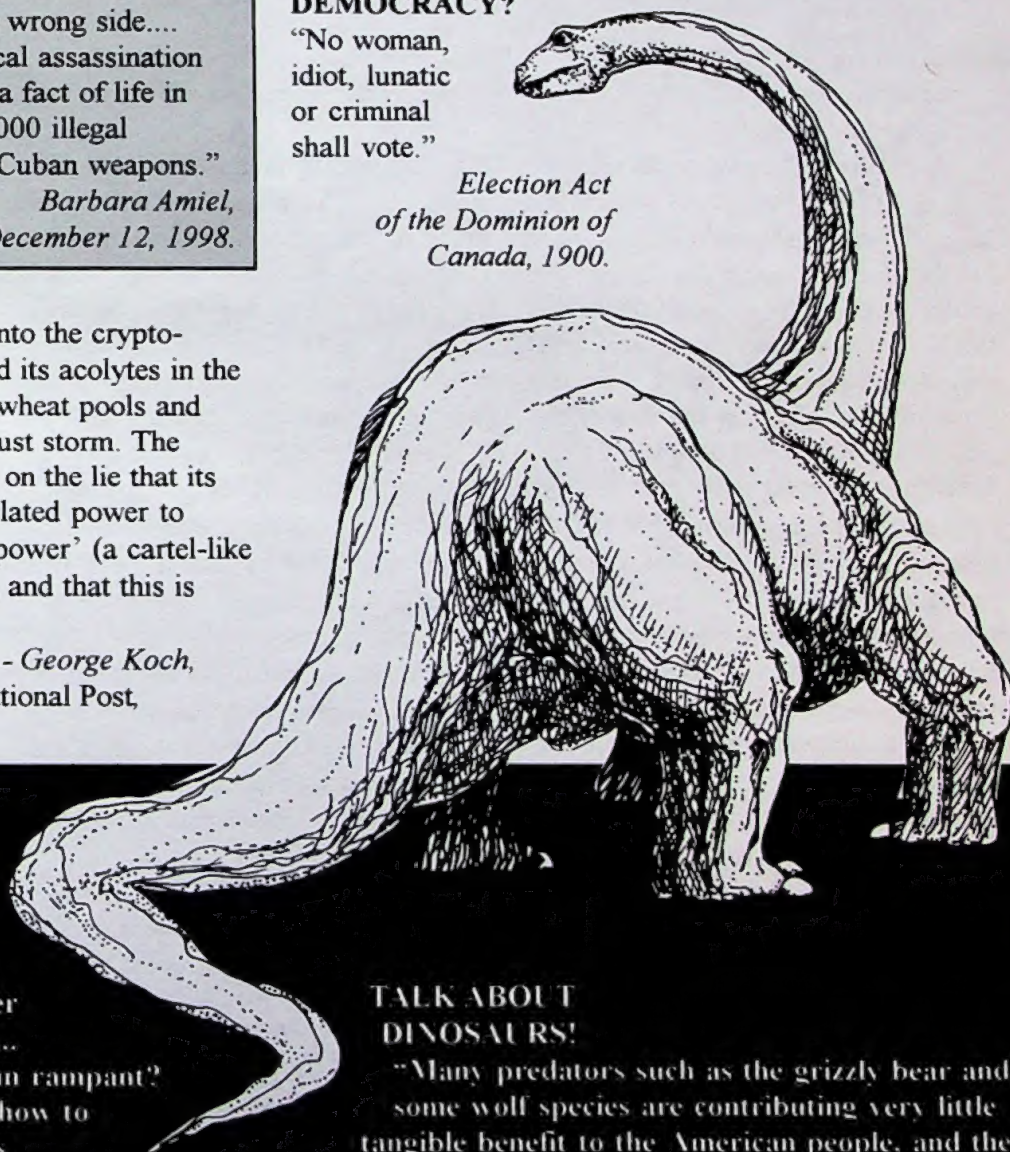
- Ted Nugent,  
U.S. rock star, who is trying to organize a tourism boycott of Canada because of Ontario's decision to ban its spring bear hunt.

# Say What??

## DEMOCRACY?

"No woman, idiot, lunatic or criminal shall vote."

Election Act  
of the Dominion of  
Canada, 1900.



## TALK ABOUT DINOSAURS!

"Many predators such as the grizzly bear and some wolf species are contributing very little tangible benefit to the American people, and the extinction of the dinosaur, brontosaurus, pterodactyl, sabertooth tiger and countless other species is not hindering the occupation of Earth by the human race, and Therefore we strongly urge that the Endangered Species Act be reworded...."

- New Mexico Farm Bureau  
policy recommendation for 1999.



# Y Not?

by Loretta Gerlach



Cathy who makes it to aerobics at 6:30 a.m. twice per week before work, union business, supervising at her son's daycare and taking care of her aging parents.

6) Health and Wellness - awarded to Leanne, a survivor of breast cancer.

7) Contribution to a Rural Community - let's give this one to Diane, who keeps our kids safe when she drives the local school bus, works in the local grocery store and still manages to help keep the family farm afloat.

8) Young Woman of Distinction - awarded to Allison who is paying off her student loan and dreaming of a unionized job.

9) Lifetime Achievement - and the winner is, Beth, who is a tried and true sister, daughter, partner, mother, activist, neighbour and friend.

So, here's to all my sisters; even if your name is not Jennifer, Nicky, Michelle, Leah, Cathy, Leanne, Diane, Allison, or Beth; my guess is you are just like them, women of distinction.

*Loretta Gerlach was a nominee for the 1995 YWCA award for Young Woman of Distinction. She neither won nor had anything to wear to the dinner.*

My Opinion does not necessarily represent the editorial views of *Briarpatch*. We welcome submissions and encourage any ensuing dialogue.

At the end of April, the Regina YWCA will host their 17th Annual Women of Distinction "Gala." For a mere \$75 or so, you can attend this glamorous dinner, and watch women from nine categories win the acknowledgement of their "community." And, at the end of the day, the YWCA will use the profits from this event to fund their important services such as the Isabel Johnson Shelter. So, let's take money from the rich people who can afford it to honour high profile women and give the cash to a good cause. Sounds good, right?

It's a rarity for those of us in the working class to be nominated for these awards. When it happens, the real honour is in having some of your contemporaries offer your name for nomination. After that, it's tough. Your life and beliefs become an object of scrutiny. You may need to defend your values and activism against the charity and beneficence of women with whom you may have little in common. Your friends and family can't possibly afford to attend the dinner to give you support, and you need to find something suitable to wear to that darn gala.

It's nice that many middle and upper class women have the privilege of recognition by a select group of

three or four of their peers. But what about all the women who do not have loads of cash to give away in grand gestures of philanthropy or did not have the privilege to get the education necessary to find the cure for cancer, or did not have the luxury of leisure time to volunteer for charity X, Y or Z? There are so many women of great distinction that never get acknowledgement for all their wonderful contributions. I would like to take this opportunity to honour each and every one of them now.

1) Arts and Culture - awarded to Jennifer, who had to get off work early for an entire week so her teenage son could participate in painting a mural at his inner city school instead of babysitting his little sister.

2) Business, Labour and Professions - and the award goes to Nicky, who was able to get childcare in order to attend her union local's meeting last Thursday.


3) Community or Humanitarian Service - awarded to Michelle, the waitress who, in a great act of charity, did not slap the 900th male customer who called her "Babe."

4) Science and Technology - this one goes to Leah who made an edible meal for her family out of nothing but macaroni, 2% milk and dill weed.

5) Sports and Recreation - kudos to




# What the corporations will be buying today.



Our hospitals



Our schools



Our water supply



Our roads

They're on a shopping spree. Snapping up the public services that make our communities work. And while corporations make a tidy profit, we pay the price — lower quality, reduced safety, restricted access and loss of control.

It's time to stop the selloff.

Check [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca) to get the facts on privatization. Find out why Public Works!

**Public!**  
**WORKS!**



Canadian Union of Public Employees



# Which Side Are You On?

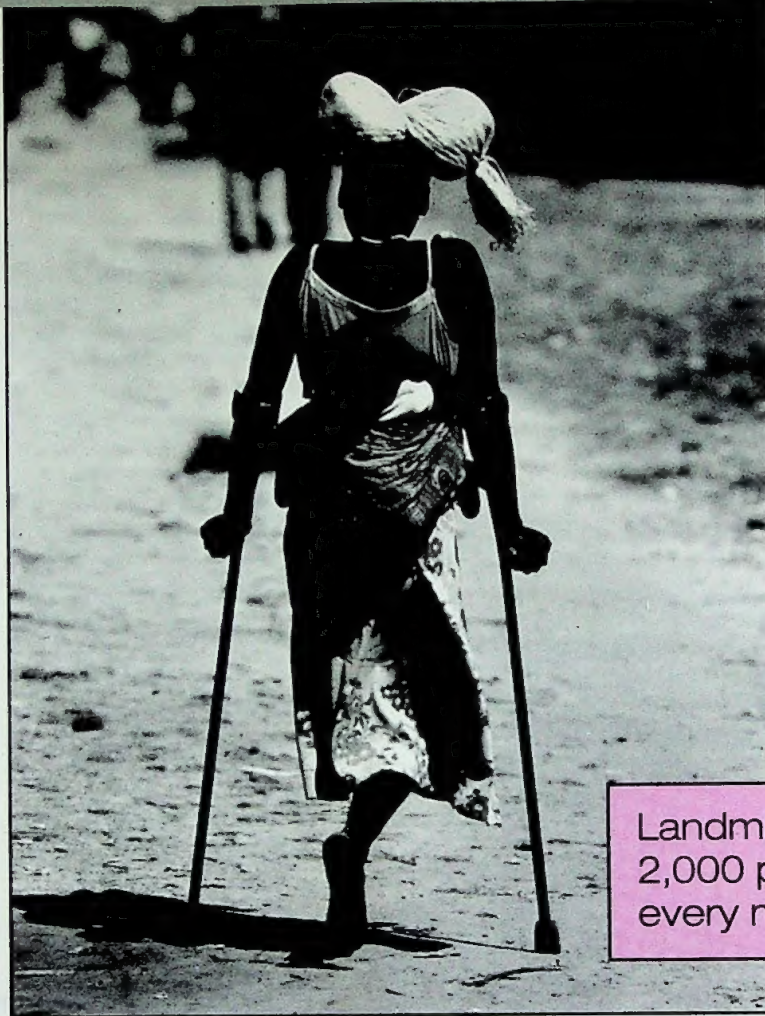


Photo credit: International Committee of the Red Cross

Landmines kill or maim  
2,000 people worldwide  
every month.

## OUR UNION IS CLEAR

Workers Rights Not Greed,  
Justice Not Exploitation,  
Peace Not Landmines.

CAW  TCA  

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CANADA

Canadian Auto Workers: a different kind of union  
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